



# Mindfulness among employees

Seeking focus at work

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>In today's hectic and changing western society, people tend to be subjected to stress and easily burn out. The prescription of sick leaves is a common task of doctors and results in notable economic consequences to corporations and to society. There is a constantly growing interest in health at work, and attention has thus turned to ways in which wellbeing can be promoted. Organizations and employees need to adapt to an increasingly complex and changing work environment. Competitiveness and a fast pace challenge the employees in their everyday performance. It is essential for the employers and employees to recognize the mutual long-term benefits that can be achieved through mindfulness practice.</p> <p>The aim of this thesis is to explore the perceived benefits of mindfulness practice for employees. Furthermore, this thesis also aims at discussing the possibilities of using mindfulness meditation as a tool for preventing and decreasing sick leave and presenteeism in Finland. In this qualitative study, an eight-week mindfulness program was carried out by a selected sample to analyse the relation between mindfulness training and well-being at workplaces. The sample consisted of 24 individuals, of whom 14 were familiar with mindfulness from before. Additionally, one expert interview was carried out to gain further in-depth understanding.</p> <p>Results indicate that mindfulness meditation could be a tool for preventing and reducing sickness absence and presenteeism in Finland. Through training in mindfulness, the ability to find more flexible solutions to problems increases and the automated way to handle things is reduced. Mindfulness meditation may be considered a basic method for self-care, stress reduction and personal development.</p>	
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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>I dagens hektiska och föränderliga västerländska samhälle tenderar folk att bli stressade och lätt få burnout. Att skriva ut sjukledighet är vanligt bland läkare och resulterar i anmärkningsvärda ekonomiska konsekvenser för företag och för samhället. Det finns ett ständigt växande intresse för hälsa på jobbet och uppmärksamhet har därmed riktat sig mot att främja välbefinnandet bland anställda. Organisationer och anställda måste anpassa sig till en alltmer komplex och förändrad arbetsmiljö. Konkurrens och snabb takt utmanar medarbetarna i deras vardagliga prestationer. Det är viktigt för arbetsgivarna och medarbetarna att känna igen de ömsesidiga långsiktiga fördelar som kan uppnås genom utövandet av mindfulness.</p> <p>Syftet med denna avhandling är att utforska de upplevda fördelarna med mindfulness träning för anställda. Vidare syftar denna avhandling också till att diskutera möjligheterna att använda medvetenhetsmeditation som ett verktyg för att förebygga och minska sjukfrånvaro och presenteeism i Finland. I denna kvalitativa studie genomfördes ett åtta-veckors mindfulness-program av ett utvalt sampel för att analysera förhållandet mellan mindfulness-träning och välbefinnande på arbetsplatser. Samplet bestod av 24 personer, varav 14 var bekanta med mindfulness från tidigare. Dessutom genomfördes en expertintervju för att få en djupare förståelse.</p> <p>Resultat från den genomförda studien visar på att mindfulness meditation kan vara ett verktyg som kan användas för förebyggande och minskning av sjukfrånvaro och presenteeism i Finland. Genom träning i mindfulness ökar möjligheten att hitta flexibla problemlösningar och det automatiserade sättet att hantera saker reduceras. Mindfulness meditation skulle kunna anses vara en grundläggande metoderna för självomsorg, stressreducering och personlig utveckling.</p>	
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**Mindfulness** – Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. (Kabat-Zinn 2005)

**Meditation** – Meditation is perceived to be any activity in which the individual's attention is primarily focused on a repetitious cognitive activity. Authentic meditation enables the ability to focus on the “present moment” rather than dwelling on the unchangeable past or unknown future. (Manocha 2000)

**Yoga** – Yoga is an ancient exercise form that combines physical training with aiming for mental and spiritual wellbeing. Yoga has its roots in India, and the word yoga is Sanskrit and means to unite or to join. This connection is thought to occur between body, mind and spirit. (Wiik 2014)

**WBW** – Wellbeing at work means healthy and productive work by competent workers who feel their job is meaningful. (Pahkin & Halonen 2017)

**MBI** – Mindfulness based interventions are therapeutic approaches based on mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) are some mindfulness-based interventions. (Kabat-Zinn 2003)

## FOREWORD

*“To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. All that is important is this one moment in movement. Make the moment vital and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused.”*

*(Kabat-Zinn 2014: Grahm 2014 p. 45)*

The author of this study attained interest in mindfulness meditation and its practice after a stressful and demanding year of studies combined with work. Consequently, a tool was needed for reducing stress, increasing wellbeing and finding focus. This is where the researcher's journey within mindful practice began.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and motivation

In today's hectic and changing western society, people tend to be subjected to stress and easily burn out. Sick leave results in notable economic consequences to corporations and society. Hence, encouraging employees to slow down and focus on the present can seem at odds with a corporate culture of speed and goal attainment.

The prescription of sick leaves is a common task of doctors and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland pays sickness allowance as compensation for loss of earnings caused by an illness or accident to Finnish citizens. Expenditure on social and healthcare in Finland was approximately EUR 8.28 billion in 2011. (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)

Mindfulness is a relatively new topic, and there is a limited amount of research on it. Researchers' interest in mindfulness has increased as studies continue to reveal its beneficial effects. Current research (AMRA 2016; Kabat-Zinn 2014; Lazar et al. 2005 etc.) examines how the brain responds to mindfulness practice, how both physical and mental health is enhanced, and how relationships benefit from it. To be "mindful", or consciously present in the moment, is an approach that humans have within them by nature. People tend to become calmer, more open to their surroundings and learn to understand and observe, leading to better decision-making. (Flaxman & Flook 2008)

Mindfulness is a fast-growing area of study (Brown et al. 2007; Reitz & Chaskalson 2016). The concept is in its foundation a mental training method that aims to increase the ability to maintain focus on the present and thus training the ability to create distance to distracting thoughts and feelings of concern.

Several well-known and respected organizations have long recognized the benefits resulting from mindfulness meditation. Google prides itself as an example amongst forward-thinking companies that offer mindfulness meditation programs for their

employees. (Schaufenbuel 2015) Google believes that these programs increase the personal wellbeing and teach emotional intelligence, which helps employees to better understand themselves, their colleagues' and their customers' motivations (Chade-Meng 2012).

Moreover, the modern society values health; it is core to wellbeing and happiness. Appropriate health enables a long, fulfilling and productive life. This study aims at exploring mindfulness meditation and its effects on employees. External health and wellbeing start from within.

## **1.2 Research aim and question**

There is a constantly growing interest in health at work (Mills 2005), and attention has thus turned to ways in which wellbeing can be promoted (Herold 2017). Mindfulness helps people to be more effective by directing focus to the most pertinent task at hand. Therefore, mindfulness training at work could be considered important since research (Davis & Hayes 2012; Chade-Meng 2012; Hoffman 2017 etc.) reveals that it results in improved performance and health. However, it appears that only a few studies (AMRA 2015; Huang et al. 2015; AMRA 2016; Klatt et al. 2016 etc.) discuss the actual effects of mindfulness practice among employees.

The aim of this research is to explore perceived benefits of mindfulness practice for employees. The research question for this study is defined as follows:

- *Which are the perceived benefits of practicing mindfulness for employees?*

Furthermore, this thesis also aims at discussing the possibilities of using mindfulness meditation as a tool for preventing and decreasing sick leave and presenteeism in Finland.

## **1.3 Research method and material**

This research consists of a theoretical background, literature review and a conducted qualitative study that aim to test and explore the stated research question. The literature

review explores the development of mindfulness meditation, healthcare expenditure and wellbeing at work.

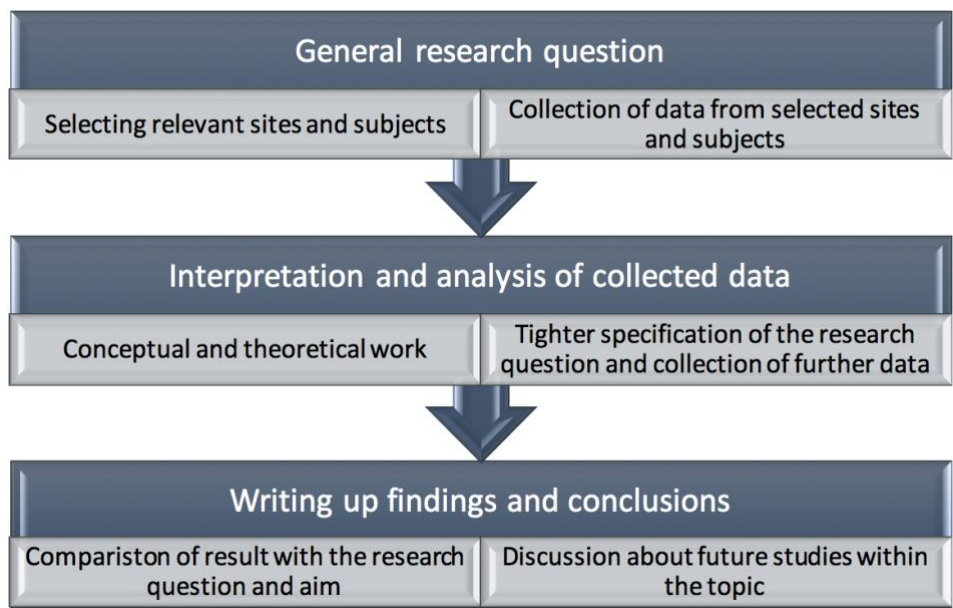
Mindfulness meditation has been researched but mainly from a medical perspective. The possible connection that mindfulness may have to work, from a business perspective, has not yet received the same attention and may still be considered a new research area. For this reason, the available data and past research on mindfulness in the business world may be considered scarce. To analyse the relation between mindfulness meditation and wellbeing at work, a qualitative study was carried out on a selected sample. This research has been conducted through the application of an eight-week mindfulness meditation program. The collected data was then processed through an inductive approach reflected on the set research question. Furthermore, these results debate that healthcare expenditure in Finland could be reduced. Additionally, one expert interview was carried out to gain further in-depth understanding.

## **1.4 Research structure**

Following the introduction, this thesis continues with the theoretical framework in chapter two. Firstly, mindfulness is defined and explored. Secondly, the theoretical framework takes a look at work inability and healthcare expenditure. This part reflects on the ongoing discussion of lost labour input, its causes and healthcare costs in Finland. Calculations on healthcare expenditure have been made and sickness absence and presenteeism are examined to support the calculations. The chapter is summed up by discussing wellbeing at work.

In chapter three, this study describes the used method and conduction of the research. The researcher carefully describes the choice of method, the data collection and the analysis process. The importance of reliability and validity of the outcome is discussed. The results and reflections of this study are presented in chapter four. The researcher clearly describes the outcome of the carried-out research and carefully analyses the collected survey responses. This chapter is summed up by a reflection that compares the found results and previously available data.

To conclude in chapter five, the final findings are presented which are followed by a critical review. This summary aims at efficiently describing the outcome of this research and clearly stating the result. The critical review and discussion, according to Larsson's criteria, on the emerged result aims at checking the robustness of the performed research and selected method. The author also mentions the contribution to the research gap and puts emphasis on the proposal for future research.



The research process of this study is described in the below figure:

Figure 1: Research Process

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Interest in health and wellbeing of the workforce has been increasing during the recent decades. This partly due to the ever-rising healthcare costs, but also as the overall economic awareness in the developed world has changed remarkably. Thus, health is an important enabler and prerequisite for attaining, not only an individual's goals and aspirations but also society's social and economic goals. (Mills 2005) In order to give a clear image, theory and recent insights are discussed in this chapter.

### **2.1 Mindfulness meditation**

Mindfulness meditation is the energy of being awake and aware to the present moment. Awareness of the breath is the essence of mindfulness. The practice of mindfulness leads to concentration, which in turn leads to insight. (Hanh 2009) Mindfulness is described as a mental state of mind that is not necessarily a consequence of meditation training (Brown & Ryan 2007). This means that individuals can achieve this state of mind given that they focus their attention on the present (Weick & Sutcliffe 2006).

Despite the significant history of the topic, actual interest in the western world did not emerge until recently (Dane 2011). The impact came in 1979 when the American molecular biologist Jon Kabat-Zinn presented the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction mindfulness program (hereafter referred to as MBSR), an exercise program that extends over eight weeks. The program was originally developed to generate a stress reduction tool for chronically ill. Since then, the academic interest in mindfulness has exploded (Brown et al. 2007)

Although the academic interest in mindfulness has grown in recent decades, the research area is still young. Previous research has primarily been focused on evaluating the clinical effects of the previously mentioned MBSR program (Carling 2010). Little research has been carried out on other mindfulness programs that extend during shorter periods of time (Glück & Maercker 2011; Krusche et al. 2012). As it seems, most of the conducted research is mainly from a medical perspective.

The process of mindfulness meditation may be considered simple, as illustrated in figure 2. It starts with an intention (1), a reason for wanting to abide in mindfulness. Every time an intention is created; a mental habit is reinforced. Secondly, attention (2) is gathered. At this stage the mind is calm, concentrated and in flow with the breath. After this follows the cognitive process (3). In this state of distraction rumination or worrying may occur, or even fantasizing. This is when attentional focus has to be regained, by bringing attention back to the process of breathing. In this stage, it is also important to remember the essential insight that was set in the beginning of the practice. Attitude (4) is the last factor to become aware of when exploring how the self is being treated. Every time an attitude of self-directed kindness is created; a habit of the practice is deepened little by little. (Chade-Meng 2012; Kabat-Zinn 2014)

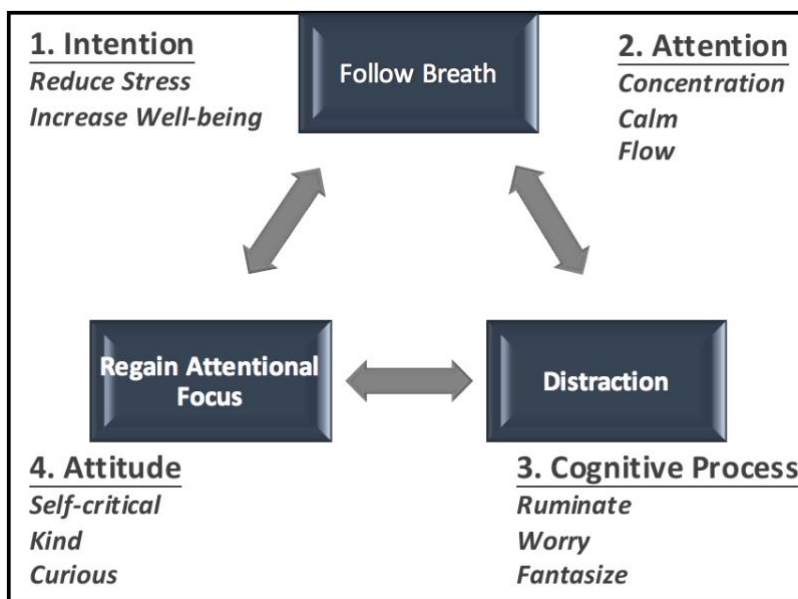


Figure 2: Process model of mindfulness meditation (based on Chade-Meng 2012)

There are a number of definitions of mindfulness. For instance, mindfulness is seen as an awareness that is non-judging, friendly and does not seek to add or subtract anything from the experience before it. Mindfulness arises as one pays attention – on purpose – in the present moment. Further, the capacity to be mindful lies in all human beings. Most importantly, to be “mindful” is an engagement to reside as best one can from moment to

moment in awareness with a spacious, non-judging, non-reactive mind without allowing the mind to wander. (Brantley 2005; Kabat-Zinn 2014)

### 2.1.1 The science of mindfulness

The psychologists Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert of Harvard University state that: “A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind”. (Brandt 2010) Studies in mindfulness show that mindfulness practice results in benefits such as; mental clarity, emotional intelligence, increased ability to handle stress and self-awareness. It also promotes metacognitive awareness, decreases rumination and enhances attentional capacities through gains in the working memory. (Davis & Hayes 2012)

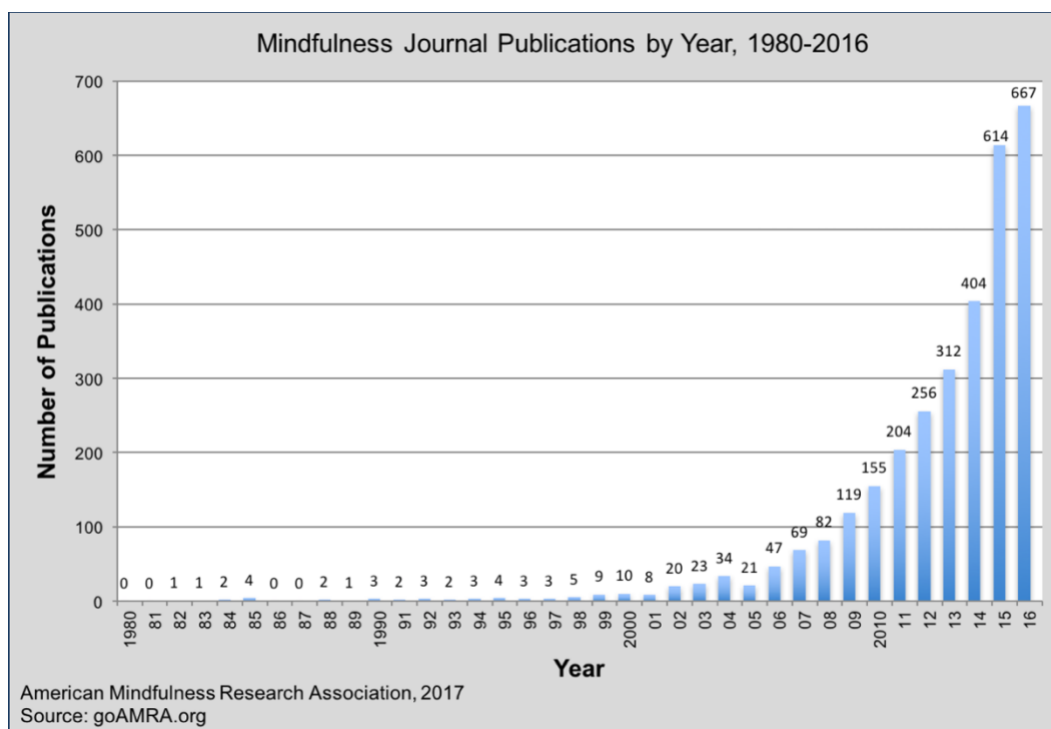


Figure 3: Mindfulness Journal Publications by Year, 1980-2016 (AMRA 2017)

Figure 3 illustrates how the interest in mindfulness has increased over the years. In the 1980s, mindfulness was introduced to the western world and only a few studies had been made. In the 1990s a slight increase occurred, but it was not until 2009 that more than 100 publications on the subject were released. Since then, the number of studies has

increased by almost 100 publications per year. In 2016, an archive of 667 studies was recorded. (AMRA 2017)

A conducted study shows that following a stressful laboratory task, Chinese undergraduates reported better stress regulation, as measured by a faster decrease in levels of the stress hormone cortisol, already after five days of mindful meditation training at 20 minutes a day. These students also reported less anxiety, depression, and anger compared to a group of students that received relaxation training. (Flaxman & Flook 2008)

The results of another study published by Lazar et al. (2005) in a *NeuroReport*, points towards the potential for mindfulness to affect the structure and neural patterns present in the brain. The results have been seen to last, not only during the mindfulness practice but also during the everyday life of practitioners.

Studies of mindfulness have consistently found several supporting arguments that demonstrate its effectiveness as a health-promoting activity. The results of Lazar et al. (2005) may be a key foundation to the “science of mindfulness”. There have been remarkable developments in neurology, and mindfulness now has a scientific background. Neurologists have classified brainwave patterns into four types; Beta, Alpha, Theta and Delta. Mindfulness meditation, when practiced regularly, can change brain wave patterns to gradually go from Beta to Delta. (Morgan 2015) This indicates that mindfulness meditation leads to a more calm and relaxed mind.



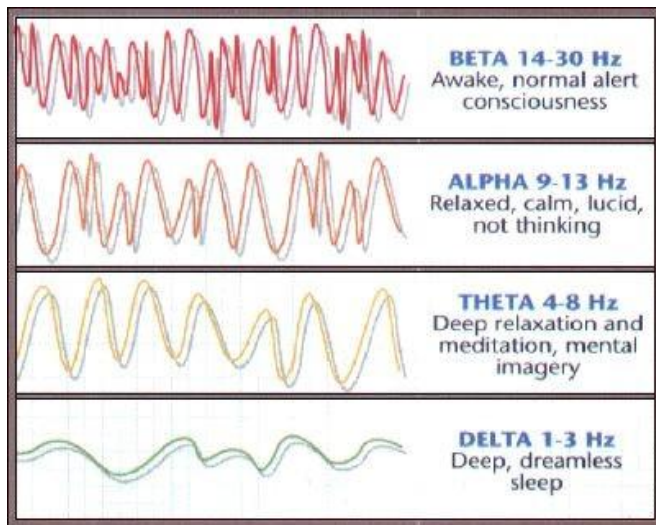


Figure 4: Brain wave patterns (Schutt 2016)

### 2.1.2 Difference between Mindfulness and Meditation

Meditation and other mental training exercises derive from the 2,500-year old Buddhist and Hindu traditions. The past 30 years have witnessed an increasing interest in these practices. (Herbert & Forman 2012) Research has shown that mindfulness training, in the form of meditation, has been a significant part of the Asian and Buddhist culture of the millennium (Conze 1956; Kabat-Zinn 2005). Within Buddhism, mindfulness and meditation are interlinked, where mindfulness as a condition is practiced through meditation (Kabat-Zinn 2003). However, mindfulness and meditation remain separate terms although they in many cases are interlinked (Dane 2011).

The terms “meditation” and “mindfulness” are frequently used and often highlighted in studies about overall health. The differences between mindfulness and meditation have been debated and interpreted in many ways and it is likely that the discussion will continue. The two terms complete each other and very often overlap, but at the same time each has its own specific purpose and definition. (Kabat-Zinn 2014; Winter 2016)

Mindfulness is a form of meditation. There are many forms of meditation but mindfulness is the sort where the full mind is brought to one object. Being mindful of the breath, for example, is a common form of mindfulness during meditation. Following the breath

improves awareness of being in the present. (Bushak 2016) Meditation is a term that broadly clusters together a wide range of practices under one category, which is convenient from a language perspective but can lead to confusion when understanding particulars. Meditation is a large term that encompasses the practice of reaching ultimate consciousness and concentration, cultivating emotions, acknowledging the mind and self-regulating it. In terms of technique, mindfulness is much more specific than meditation. The major difference is that the term “meditation” is broader, whilst “mindfulness” is more specific. (Winter 2016)

The second major difference has to do with the fact that meditation is often associated with religious or spiritual groups. Mindfulness is distinctly non-religious. Because it is specific and secular, mindfulness has naturally been of greater appeal to the business and scientific communities than many other types of meditation practices. (Kabat-Zinn 2014; Winter 2016)

### **2.1.3 New areas for Mindfulness**

While research gives a glimpse into many topics of studies involving mindfulness, it does not capture the complete picture. Some areas have yet barely been touched by investigators, including mindfulness in the workplace (Davis & Hayes 2012). Initial research has suggested, that both shortened and online mindfulness programs are associated with long-term positive work-related benefits (Hyland et al. 2015). Future investigations may increasingly shed light on both how mindfulness works, as well as directly comparing various forms of practice within corporations (Davis & Hayes 2012).

Several well-known and respected companies have long recognized the benefits that mindfulness meditation brings. Google is one of the multinational organizations that strive to be socially conscious, offering its employees significant benefits and perks, including more than a dozen mindfulness courses. Google’s most popular mindfulness course, “Search inside yourself” (offered since 2007), has thousands of alumni. Google believes that these mindfulness programs teach emotional intelligence, which assists employees in better understanding themselves, their colleagues’ and customers’

motivations and intentions. They also improve mental focus and boost resilience to stress. Participants of the “Search Inside Yourself” program report being calmer, more patient, and better able to listen. They also confirm that the program has helped them in handling stress and defuse emotions. (Chade-Meng 2012; Schaufenbuel 2015)

According to a research carried out by Huang et al. (2015), employee psychological distress negatively affects workplace productivity, absenteeism, and disability. Therefore, employers have a financial stake in the levels of distress and emotional wellbeing of their employees. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) may have the potential to reduce job stress and improve employee psychological health in ways that benefit both employee and employer. The results demonstrate that psychologically distressed employees, who participated in a MBI program offered during paid work hours, showed reduced anxiety, depression, stress, and fatigue. Concluding that the MBI helped employees deal more skillfully with their emotions. (AMRA 2015; Huang et al. 2015)

Following up on the above an even more recent study published by AMRA (American Mindfulness Research Association) in 2016 has stated, that workplace mindfulness intervention may lower overall healthcare costs. Healthcare costs in the US have been rising and employers are increasingly turning to workplace-based lifestyle interventions to control employee healthcare costs. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are occasionally offered in workplaces to enhance employee self-care and decrease illness-causing stress. A research analysed a five-year healthcare utilization and the associated costs for participants in a workplace-based MBI, using a quasi-experimental design. The study shows a significant trend towards the workplace interventions lowering overall healthcare costs. The participants were considerably less likely to visit their primary care doctors and to be hospitalized. (AMRA 2016; Klatt et al. 2016) According to Seppänen (2010), there is a growing interest in wellbeing and health at work in Finland. Attention has thus turned towards analysing the positive ways in which well-being can be promoted, with improved attendance being a possible outcome (Herold 2017).

## **2.2 Work inability**

According to Guy Ahonen, emeritus professor at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, work disability in Finland is a serious, large and extremely expensive problem which according to his calculations amounts to at least EUR 25 billion a year. Ahonen estimates, that the annual costs of work sickness appear in workplaces as sickness absences, incapacity to work and nonalignment. Ahonen has been criticized for his calculations since it is impossible to completely eradicate work sickness. Ahonen does not argue the criticism but believes that the Finnish business life and society can be enhanced if the above mentioned is taken into consideration on workplace level. (Mikkonen 2016)

One reason why not enough attention is paid to wellbeing at work is the supposed “core business thinking” in Finland: it is modern to think that the company must only focus on its own core business and the rest is secondary. It is still commonly thought that one does not go to work to enjoy, but solely to execute work. Thus, Ahonen believes that his thoughts are fighting against the traditional concepts of working. This is why it may be of great importance to update the general vision of work. It is suggested that the final result is better if a person feels that their work is a meaningful and an important part of their own life. (Mikkonen 2016; Hagelsam 2017)

Furthermore, the savings and cuts imposed by the Finnish government are also worrying. Ahonen emphasizes that there really are ways to improve wellbeing at work. During the past years, Ahonen has been studying a couple of thousand Finnish organizations together with his researcher Ossi Aura. The results speak for themselves; when a company has invested consciously into wellbeing, it also results in greater profit. By developing the leadership within organizations, and simultaneously the capabilities of the staff, the company starts producing results. (Mikkonen 2016; Miller 2016; Herold 2017)

### **2.2.1 Cost of lost labour input and healthcare expenditure in Finland**

Lost labour input generates costs both to employers and the Finnish society. Measuring the costs of this lost labour input involves a multi-layered approach. This includes costs

relating to productivity, healthcare, quality of life, administration and insurance. Studies and calculations of these costs have been made from the Finnish national economy's point of view. It is suggested that workplaces themselves can make work more productive and improve the wellbeing of their own personnel. Therefore, it is important to calculate which costs of the lost labour input focus on workplaces. (Ojala & Ahonen 2003; Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)

Research done by Rissanen and Kaseva (2014) for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland regarding the cost of lost labour input, aim to find a generally acceptable method to calculate the minimum costs of lost labour input. The lost labour input is a cost for the employer. These calculations state that the cost of lost labour input is at least as high as the pay of the employee, including non-wage labour costs. If the input is higher than the minimum, companies can more effectively concentrate on both identifying the causes of increased costs and take actions to reduce them.

Rissanen and Kaseva (2014) use data from 2012, the latest year for which all background information necessary for this purpose is available. However, in their study the healthcare costs of the population are from the year 2011, which was the latest year fully included in the statistics. The calculations cover mainly wage-earners — and are restricted by the availability of data. When calculating the cost of lost labour input due to sickness absence and presenteeism, an employee's pay, including non-wage labour costs, was used as a basis. These results can be reused for calculating the costs of sickness absence and presenteeism on workplace level. (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)

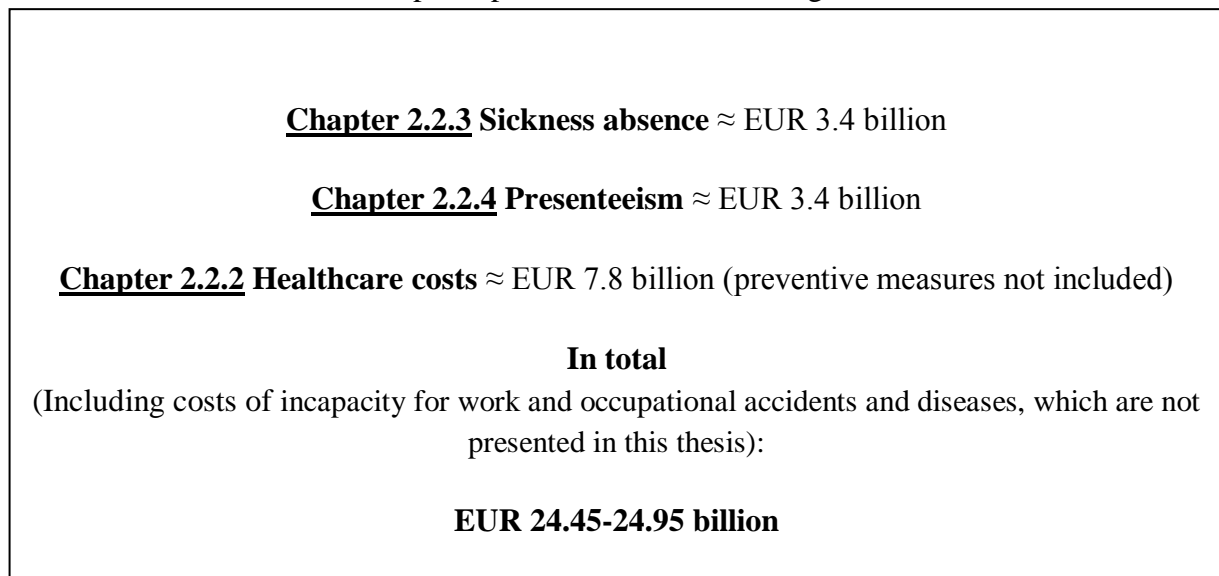
### **2.2.2 Calculation of healthcare expenditure**

In 2011, the cost of healthcare for the working-age population (aged 15–64) amounted to EUR 8.28 billion. In the same year, the expenditure for preventive measures and health promotion were about EUR 488 million. The figure (EUR 488 million) includes only the first compensation class of the occupational healthcare; expenditure for preventive measures and for activities maintaining the workability of employees. The healthcare costs of the working-age population without preventive measures are EUR 7 792 million (EUR 8 280 million – EUR 488 million). The estimation of the mentioned healthcare

expenditure for the working-age population in Finland is not updated annually. (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)

The primary national health problems are not work-related but can be affected by work. Work and working conditions as such, do cause some of the illnesses. Currently, it is not possible to define the percentage caused by work and working conditions among all health expenditure. Interventions which are carried out at workplace level can have an impact on work arrangements and health behaviour, which can reduce the public healthcare problems on an individual level. (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014; Miller 2016)

The total cost of lost labour input is presented in the below figure:



*Figure 5: Healthcare expenditure calculations (based on Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)*

### **2.2.3 Sickness absence**

One of the most important factors leading to loss of labour input at workplaces is sickness absence. The periods of sickness absence are not divided evenly between the different wage-earner groups. Especially when relating to long-term sick leaves, socio-economic differences are emphasized. By calculating the cost of lost labour input separately for short-term and long-term sick leaves, the impact of the above-mentioned differences can be taken into account. (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the sickness absence rate in Finland appears to have increased. Sick leave has been estimated to be the single most expensive component of costs in medical practice, even more expensive than drug prescriptions, from a societal perspective. In 2012, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland paid out over EUR 862 million in sickness benefits. When the costs due to employing the replacement workers and production losses are taken into consideration, the actual economic consequences of sick leave are even greater. (Kankaanpää 2014)

In 2012 wage-earners had 20 193 000 sickness days in total, according to Statistics Finland. Data by KELA (the Finnish public healthcare system) states that long-term absences covered 11 414 403 days. Sickness days due to short-term absence was then 8 778 597 in total. The approximate final cost of lost labour input due to sickness absence was EUR 3.4 billion. (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014)

### **2.2.4 Presenteeism**

Presenteeism – meaning being present at work while feeling ill or being unable to work at normal capacity – surprisingly incurs the same cost as absenteeism. International studies show that presenteeism is as prevalent as absenteeism. When illness inhibits the job performance or completely prevents it, work goes undone regardless of whether one is present in the workplace or not. (Mannonen & Waller 2015) Presenteeism may mean that measured absence levels are low but also that there are hidden stresses and pressures on employees that remain unknown (Seppänen 2010).

According to Rissanen, Senior Officer at the MSAH's Department of Occupational Safety and Health, sickness absenteeism, presenteeism, work disability pensions and healthcare cost the Finnish economy approximately EUR 2 billion a month. The major burden is carried by employers, but also employees and public finances shoulder a share of the costs. A major concern at EU level is the issue of lost labour input, primarily due to occupational health and safety shortcomings, which result in workplace absenteeism and presenteeism. (Mannonen & Waller 2015)

## **2.3 Wellbeing at work and mindfulness**

Appropriate health may be considered core to wellbeing and happiness. Healthy employees are also likely to be beneficial for business. Health is often affected by the social, physical and economic environments, as well as individual characteristics and behaviours. Public policies can make a major difference for health and health equity by creating healthy environments, which also promote healthy choices. (Ojala & Ahonen 2003)

A modern society has been created where companies face constant increasing competition. Long-term survival and success requires continuous development, improvement and innovation of the business. This modern trend is dependent on the people and their competence, abilities and synergies within the organizations. In today's western society, investing in the wellbeing of employees can support this change. Capable, motivated and healthy employees are competent and willing to strive and work for the company objectives. Not only is the previously mentioned of great importance for the employee, also the employer will gain from supporting and taking the employees' wellbeing into consideration. A healthy and productive personnel may be considered part of the organization's most valuable assets. (Ojala & Ahonen 2003; Miller 2016)

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Pahkin & Halonen 2017) states that wellbeing at work (WBW) means productive and healthy work by workers that are competent and feel that their job is meaningful. The organization's competitive advantage, profitability as well as reputation, is influenced by WBW. Interventions to support WBW may result in multiple returns. In an overview of current research, Miller



(2016) concludes that an organization with wellbeing at its core will achieve productivity gains. Miller also points out that the total costs of poor wellbeing and the benefits of promoting wellbeing for productivity are significant. However, he concludes that there remain many unanswered questions and it is unclear what the nature of the link between wellbeing, productivity and the economic impacts are. Moreover, Aura et al. (2015) see a clear link between WBW and employee productivity, defining the latter as an individual feature that consists of workability, motivation and competence. It is argued that WBW is the key to increased productivity for the economy.

Hietalahti and Pusenius (2012) studied the employee responsibility as a factor in wellbeing at work. They found that the role of employee responsibility was most prominent in the area of competence and related work management as practical solutions to cope with the requirements of work; willingness to learn and find solutions when faced with new challenges, organizing and outlining work as well as the ability to schedule and prioritize. Using these resources of work management independently supported employees' wellbeing at work, which explains the importance of own responsibility in WBW and coping in the current hectic work culture. The authors suggest training in work management and self-leadership for employees.

According to Ojala & Ahonen (2003) wellbeing at work influences an organization's competitive advantage in many ways. It decreases costs associated with sick leave, occupational accidents and work disability. This has positive effects on productivity and profitability. WBW also improves motivation and workplace atmosphere, which improves the service level, quality and customer satisfaction. In addition, it increases joint competence and organizational learning, which enables development combined with the creation of new services and products. Finally, WBW supports engagement and commitment, which improves the company image both as an employer and as a business partner.

Work these days often results in emotionally draining long hours and complex problems that require an enormous amount of mental energy. Surveys have shown that 16-25 percent of the workforce have regular issues with not being able to switch off and are distressed by work-related thoughts. A recent study suggests that a little practice in

mindfulness can help those who have difficulties focusing during or after work. According to the results of the study, employees who completed the course reported lower levels of work-related rumination, chronic fatigue, and improved sleep quality. A final verdict indicated that especially one skill—the ability to consciously focus on moment-to-moment experiences—fully proved the benefits of mindfulness related to WBW. Those who became more attuned to present-moment thoughts could more easily affect how they feel. These findings are relevant to employers who are interested in improving the wellbeing of their workforce. (Hoffman 2017)

### **3 METHOD AND CONDUCTION OF RESEARCH**

In this section, the research strategies and methods used to answer the research question are described.

#### **3.1 Choice of approach and method**

The purpose and aim of this thesis are to explore perceived benefits of mindfulness practice for employees. Mindfulness tends to help people in being more effective by directing focus to the most pertinent task at hand and seeks to guide towards personal wellbeing.

This thesis is done as a qualitative research. Therefore, the conceptual framework of the study is not necessarily fixed from beginning to end. When working with a qualitative study, one has to take into consideration that changes in the framework can evolve as the research proceeds and new insights may be gained and unanticipated contingencies can occur. (Saldana et al. 2011)

This study is an evaluation research. Evaluation research is concerned with evaluating occurrences of organizational programmes or interventions. In fact, this research comes close to an intervention kind of study. The essence of this type of research is to find out

if the carried-out intervention has managed to achieve the anticipated goals. While there are different opinions about how qualitative evaluation should be carried out, the important part is an in-depth understanding of the context in which an intervention occurs and the diverse viewpoints of the stakeholders (Bryman & Bell 2011)

The idea behind this study is to evaluate if mindfulness meditation practice has an impact on the practitioners in their personal and work environment. In this case, the researcher decided to put a time limit of eight weeks for the participants to practice mindfulness meditation. The sample criterion was to be an employed men/woman, aged 15-64 and already practicing mindfulness meditation or to agree on commencing the practice for this study. The 24 participants were requested to practice at least ten minutes, or more, per day. Once the eight weeks had passed, all participants were requested to answer an online questionnaire in order to collect individual responses anonymously. Additionally, one expert interview was carried out to gain further in-depth understanding.

### **3.2 Data description and collection**

The data for this research was collected through qualitative surveys. The 24 informants were found through combining convenience and snowball sampling. The researcher reached out to people in her circle of friends and acquaintances, who in their turn came with further suggestions of possible participants. All individuals were either personally or indirectly familiar with the researcher.

In total 24 qualitative survey links were sent out to a sample consisting of 12 men and 12 women aged 18-64. To make the selected sample as fair as possible it was of importance that the genders were equally divided. All research participants were contacted in advance, both in person and through email or social media (Facebook). In addition, all participants received an introduction letter stating the exact purpose and intention of this research (Appendix 1).

The qualitative survey included ten open-ended questions (Appendix 2) in total, three of the questions containing subheadings. All questions were aimed to be short and direct to

avoid any type of confusion. When researching people's experiences and subjective opinions, the best way is giving the opportunity to tell about them (Jacobsen 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). The answers from the conducted qualitative survey were collected indirectly through open-ended, self-completion questionnaires and directly through one expert in-depth interview. It is important to keep in mind that open questions may produce unexpected results, which can make the research more original and valuable. However, it may be more difficult and time-consuming to analyse the results of the findings when the data is obtained through questionnaires with open questions. It requires a qualitative approach and analysis.

The data from the self-completion questionnaires was gathered through an online survey (SurveyMonkey). Since there is no interviewer administrating the completion of the questionnaire, the layout of the survey has to have a simple structure and its questions have to be easy to answer. (Bryman & Bell 2011) The expert in-depth interview was recorded and transcribed personally by the researcher. The interview was based on the same ten questions as the qualitative survey questionnaire (Appendix 2). In addition, the interviewee was asked to sign an interview consent form to ensure that the purpose of involvement is understood and that the conditions of participation are agreed on (Appendix 3). To check the validity and robustness of the carried-out research, this thesis was sent to two professionals, after which the results were discussed with the researcher. The correspondence can be found in chapter 4.5.

Amongst the respondents there were ten individuals who had not been meditating before and were new to mindfulness. These ten individuals were all provided with CD's containing guided meditation tracks. They were also introduced to two different applications (Leena Pennanen's mindfulness app and Insight Timer), that could be downloaded on smartphones for meditation guidance and assistance. In addition, a step by step guide was included (Appendix 1), where simple instructions were given on how to download the applications and how to use them. The 14 remaining individuals were already familiar with the practice and had their own habits concerning mindfulness meditation.

In addition, to gain some pre-understanding about the topic, the researcher set up a meeting with Leena Pennanen ( a mindfulness pioneer) to discuss mindfulness meditation and the work that she does in Finland. Pennanen gave some essential insights concerning mindfulness meditation and was able to support the aim of the research. Moreover, the researcher also participated in a one week MBSR course in Vierumäki, Finland where additional data was collected for this research.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

This research is qualitative and analysed through an inductive approach. Qualitative research is a term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life (Saldana et al. 2011). The inductive character aims at explaining and understanding certain observations and phenomena, in this case, subjective experiences. The researcher has tried to find patterns and regularities from an eight-week program and strived to create a research question and theory that explains the observations, and grasps the essence of a phenomenon. (Rouse 2013)

During the process, it was of interest to the researcher to minimize removal and distortion of any relevant information. The researcher also strived not to generalize without evidence. It is important to keep in mind that the result from a qualitative study does not explain or provide answers to a problem; it rather offers understanding (Olsson & Sörensen 2007; Patel & Davidson 2003). This research builds on a phenomenological research perspective that aims at exploring the outcomes of mindfulness meditation practice amongst employees.

When analysing data through a phenomenological research approach, the most common way is to read and reread the data provided. After this, similarities and meaningful units are identified and grouped into categories or comprehensive themes. The purpose is, as earlier mentioned, to find the essence in the data; the answers to how and why. Inductive reasoning is a logical process in which multiple premises, all believed true or found true most of the time, are combined to obtain a specific conclusion. (Wiik 2014) The analysing

process strives to minimize the removal and distortion of relevant information. In addition, the process also seeks to not generalize without evidence. (Bryman & Bell 2011)

The content analysis in this thesis is latent, inductive and inspired by Gran Heimer and Lundman (2004). They use the following key concepts: meaningful units, message, code, categories and themes.

Data was analysed as follows:

- The material was read in its entirety, and an overall picture created.
- Content that is consistent with the purpose of the study was marked. These markings Gran Heimer and Lundman call meaningful units.
- The meaningful units were shortened (condensed) and grouped into categories.
- Finally, the categories were collected together into themes, i.e. major "categories" or wholes.

Meaningful units and similarities in the data were highlighted and put onto post-it notes, and further put into new categories. In the final step, new themes were created with the aim to grasp the essence of the results and make a conclusion and explanation. Throughout the analysis, there is movement between the concrete (the text) and the somewhat more abstract (category/theme description) to ensure that data and analysis are consistent. The approach during the analysing process has been characterized by openness, adherence and reflection. Analysing requires patience, the researcher may have to put up with uncertainty and make sure not to be hasty when searching for meaningful elements in the text. These elements aim to provide answers to the emerging questions. (Friberg et al. 2012)

### **3.4 Reliability and validity**

Reliability describes the usability and accuracy of a measurement tool and its unit of measure (Ejvegård 2009). A high reliability means that the level of random errors is low. A high reliability also means that repeated measures should give the same result and that the test should be repeatable whenever (Ejlertsson 2014). From a replicability

perspective, the researcher has strived to describe the chosen methods and approach as comprehensively as possible. It is therefore concluded that the study should be easy to replicate.

The researcher has consistently worked with the qualitative data aware of the risk that unsafe data may occur. Meaning that the study results should not be said to be generally applicable. However, the selected method is in line with the study's purpose of conducting exploratory research and generating theoretical insights based on principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell 2011)

## **4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This chapter describes the synthesized analysis and results of the conducted empirical research. The aim of this study is to explore the perceived benefits of mindfulness practice for employees. To make the material more transparent, the open-ended questionnaire used for the qualitative survey and interviews is available in Appendix 2. The utilized survey is in English and the collected responses are in English and Swedish. Out of the 24 participants, ten did not manage to practice mindfulness meditation for eight weeks or more, and consequently they did not fill in the survey questionnaire. One participant did not respond to all the survey questions, leading to an invalid response. In addition, one expert in-depth interview was carried out by the researcher. The result of this study is based on the responses of 14 participants (13 survey respondents, one interview respondent) and presented on the basis of the four main themes that emerged when analysing the responses:

- **Regular practice in mindfulness meditation creates emotional awareness and focus**
- **Stress and emotions can be handled better through mindfulness meditation practice**
- **Mindfulness results in better self-esteem and regularity in the practice**
- **Mindfulness meditation can be implemented into organizations**

The below figure illustrates the process of finding the main results of this research:

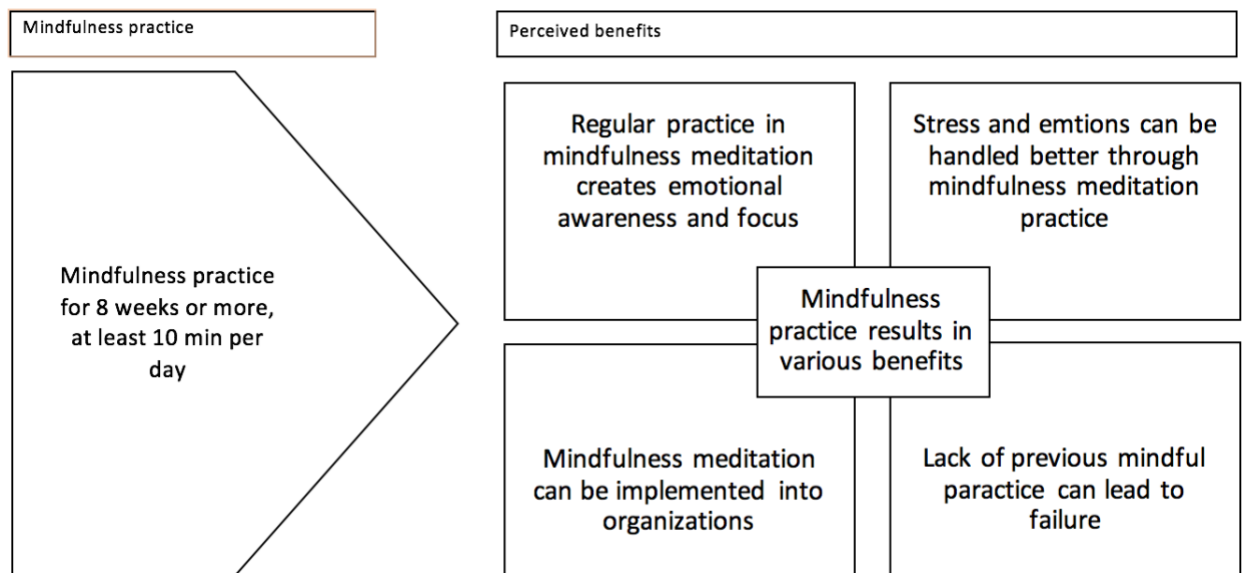
Figure 6: Performance model that visualizes the perceived benefits associated with mindfulness practice

## 4.1 Regular practice in Mindfulness meditation creates emotional awareness and focus

The analysis and results from this research indicate, that mindfulness meditation practice emerges from both personal and professional interest, in search for regularity, balance and increased focus. It has been declared that the participation in this research provided a possibility and support for regularity within the practice of mindfulness meditation.

### Focused awareness of the present

The survey endorses that an internal urge to seek inner peace and to be more aware leads to mindfulness meditation. The present moment becomes very essential since the focus is put on the here and now. Mindfulness meditation does not eliminate the



unpleasant but makes it possible to be more aware of what is going on. Most of the participants find it very hard to be here and now, the human mind typically prefers yesterday or tomorrow.



*“Everything is better when people are fully present. Not holding on to things in the past or controlling the future. Not using energy to think about past and future events, since they do not matter in the here and now (Resp. 9)”*

*“For me, the difficulty has been the requirements I put for myself. I've simply had a hard time getting along with myself as I am here and now. I've always lived in the future: Now it's not that good, but once I get this done and get there, things will get better. Or I have accused myself of something that happened or something I said that dissatisfied me. In order to be here and now, you must have tools to treat the situation that you are in. If you do not have the tools, it is so much easier to be in the past or future (Interview Resp.).”*

This research debates that mindfulness could be the previously mentioned tool. Mindfulness is about being here and now, seeing things as they happen. That is what most people miss, the things they take for granted and notice only once they are gone.

*“Here and now for me is rest and an acceptance. Acceptance is a word that is of great importance to me and a very difficult word to comprehend. If you have difficulty with acceptance, you will face difficulties to be here and now. If you manage to be here and now then you have to find a way to accept things as they are right now. At this moment, they are the way they are, and they are what exists at this very moment. Not always having to strive or worry about something you cannot influence. Some things just have to be, worrying does not help. (Interview Resp.).”*

As seen above, survey responses confirm that focusing on one task at a time improves concentration and enables clear decision making. Situations are received with lucidity and introspection, in a calmer way. It becomes possible to handle things with more equanimity.

*“I try to take just one moment at a time, be present and breathe. Divide tasks that need to be done into smaller pieces and focus wholeheartedly on what I am doing right now (Resp. 1).”*

Moreover, it emerges that the ability to be relaxed, focus on a target (e.g. task at work) and overall concentration is improved. Respondents state that they are more able to deal with being in their own power.

*“I can step out of situations, watch them play in slow motion and step in when appropriate. I don’t let small things get to me anymore (Resp. 13).”*

From the expert in-depth interview, it emerges that it is possible to be much more efficient after exercising mindfulness meditation. The ability to focus has been trained.

*“I am able to do one thing at a time and let one thing wait a little bit. I do not have to solve everything at the same time. I solve one thing at a time and let the rest wait, this way I become more efficient (Interview Resp.).”*

### **Balanced and calm**

The survey responses indicate that a greater compassion towards the self is created and less suffering is produced since it is possible to just observe the uncomfortable feelings that may arise in various situations.

*“I can handle challenging situations in life with more equanimity. I feel more at home in my body. I became calmer and more stable in my mind (Resp. 1).”*

*“Before, I mostly used to be stressed about myself and who I was, on the requirements I had for myself. That created my biggest stress. This is when I taught myself to be a little bit kinder to myself, with more compassion (Interview Resp.).”*

Mindfulness meditation seems to create knowledge about “the self” and the feeling of appreciation for surroundings and their positivity. When Mindfulness meditation practice becomes centred, a more balanced life is attained.

*“I am more aware of how I am feeling and when to take a few minutes to rebalance (Resp. 11).”*

*“Too much of anything leads to not being well. Even though you may like what you do, you become tired (Interview Resp.).”*

Some respondents also agree on that they have started using the breath as a tool for rebalancing the self when needed. Coming back to the self and focusing on the breath is the basic key to mindfulness meditation practice.

*“It is easier to notice myself getting defensive and stopping to breathe, significantly less likely to happen in general (Resp. 6).”*

The responses indicate, that when calmness exists, temper is not lost, happiness is kept and problems do not seem as difficult anymore. Greater confidence is gained in everyday life, whilst focus and attention on the unnecessary are reduced.

## **4.2 Stress and emotions can be handled better through Mindfulness meditation practice**

Furthermore, it emerges that stress is highly common in today's Western society. Stress is practically unavoidable, therefore methods to manage and to reduce it are of great importance. Mindfulness meditation enhances better control over the ego and emotions that can be challenging. A feel for serenity leads to better control over negative feelings and the environment.

### **Controlled emotions and enhanced wellbeing**

Mindful meditation seems to help in coping with stressful situations and enhances the control of unpleasant feelings. It becomes easier to block negative triggers, as seen in the responses below.

*“I don’t get stuck to ideas and emotions easily. I still react, but the emotion fades away faster (Resp. 3).”*

*“I’m simply not as easily stressed. I actually rarely get stressed about anything at all (Interview Resp.).”*

Respondents’ anxiety levels are reduced, a more grounded feeling arises and the ability to respond with a compassionate smile is enhanced. Not forcing any outcomes that may cause a lot of stress, doing less and achieving better results. Not taking things personally and accepting that whatever happens, is what happens.

*“Everything kind of flows, I don’t ruminate about things anymore (Resp. 3).”*

Further, like stated in the below answer, mindfulness can help make more sensible and constructive choices, both at work and in personal lives.

*“I’m better at making decisions, especially constructive decisions, looking logically at things and getting a little distance to my thoughts. It is possible to look from another perspective and to consider the decisions, instead of hurrying into something. It is possible to detach feelings and emotions. One can distinguish the real problem from the concern, not letting fear and the need of control to make the final choice (Interview Resp.).”*

In the expert interview it is said, that mindfulness results in the ability to realize that there are constantly different factors interfering. Mindfulness provides the possibility to understand that one has the choice not having to jump from one thing to another all the time.

*“I am now able to do one thing at a time and I do not have to solve everything at once. This makes me more efficient (Interview Resp.).”*

Respondents confirm that less stress in a stressful environment proves, that it is easier not to stress at all, leading to better relationships with co-workers. Things have a tendency to work out, therefore stress is unnecessary.

### **4.3 Mindfulness results in better self-esteem and regularity in the practice**

Busy and challenging days at work, in an environment that is demanding and tiring, puts a lot of pressure on employees. The research participants admit, that participating in this research has brought regularity into their practice.

*“Before I used mindfulness meditation now and then, the 8-week program lead to regularity in my practice (Resp. 1).”*

From the survey, it also emerges that mindfulness meditation can be practiced in two different ways, formally and informally, resulting in continuity of the practice.

*“I usually practice mindful meditation formally once a day, the informal practice is continuous (Resp. 6).”*

Having that said, the survey also confirms that mindfulness meditation practice has led to the creation of a better professional self-esteem.

*“It is easier to be in public, to be with wide audiences and to give lectures (Resp. 3).”*

The research indicates, that with a suitable self-esteem it is easier to communicate and collaborate. The ability to understand people and having empathy increases.

### **Compassion and positivity**

Respondents confirm that they have become more appreciative of the small things in life and that they do not let the unnecessary bother them as much. Increased self-esteem has

also allowed respondents to be less hard on themselves. Fury has been replaced with a compassionate smile.

*“I am calmer, don’t lose my temper, happy most of the time and problems don’t seem as difficult anymore (Resp. 9).”*

*“I’m calm and confident in myself. I trust myself in another way. I don’t feel like I need to be in control of everything. I can bear with myself even if I do not make a perfect result (Interview Resp.).”*

#### **4.4 Mindfulness and the organization**

More and more organizations are introducing the practice to their employees as positive results are seen. None of the survey respondents seem to have a negative opinion of mindfulness meditation as a practice, but some remain sceptical.

##### **Possible benefits and restrictions**

It emerges that employees would be more motivated if mindfulness meditation were to be practiced during working hours. According to the interview respondent, employees should have the opportunity to exercise mindfulness in the workplace every day.

*“If you collect as much of the staff as possible in the employer’s space during working hours then I think that the practice will be done. It would have to come from the management that someone tells what to do (Interview Resp.).”*

Moreover, results indicate that offices may benefit from having designated meditation spaces. Mindfulness workshops, guided practice or the possibility to take small mindful breaks are desired proposals amongst the respondents. This could increase efficiency and pro-active working.

*“My boss has mentioned that he would want mindfulness meditation for the staff (Resp. 11).”*

*“I feel all client offices could benefit from having a designated space for staff to ground themselves. This could help improve efficiency, pro-active working, reduce stress etc. (Resp. 13).”*

*“Mindfulness meditation is a basic human skill that fits wherever there are humans (Resp. 6).”*

However, not all responses are positive towards the implementation of mindfulness meditation practice within organizations. It is expressed that the practice does not work for everyone. With this in mind, a respondent mentions that their particular work environment requires a bit of stress, to be able to cope with the given tasks within their area of profession.

*“No, I don’t think mindfulness meditation would be a good thing as we need to be a bit stressed to be able to cope with our situations (Resp. 7).”*

It can be concluded that the general attitude towards mindfulness meditation is welcoming but some participants are uncertain how the practice will be adopted by the organization.

*“Yes and no, it depends on the employees and how openly they can handle situations. It is not easy to educate people into a practice if they don’t feel the inherent need for it (Resp. 4).”*

Having the above mentioned in mind, the survey shows an exception in relation to the rest of the respondents. One of the 14 respondents’ notes that *“I decided to start practicing mindfulness meditation because I needed to calm down and reduce stress.”* However, the result of the mindful practice was not positive. The respondent concludes that *“I quit due to lack of discipline”*, but continues and confirms that *“I try to be mindful without meditation.”* The respondent concludes that his work environment could benefit from mindfulness meditation since it is still quite stressful.

*“Better focus, less stress. It does work for some, you only know if you try it (Resp. 12).”*

## **4.5 Creating a mindful habit**

The analysis and results of this study confirm that mindfulness meditation simply does not suit everyone. It is a practice that cannot be forced, it has to emerge from own personal will. Nobody can be persuaded into practicing. This statement is also acknowledged by the ten individuals, completely new to mindfulness meditation, who were supposed to be part of the sampling sample. They agreed on meditating for eight consistent weeks, however all of them failed. The actual reason is unknown. Excuses were made but one explanation could be that they did not find the inherent need for the practice themselves.

According to Staffan Portin (expert discussion 1, 30.5.2017), people tend to need a motivator in order to get things done. Portin's personal experience within teaching mindfulness meditation has shown that people value a support network when practicing. Especially if new to the practice, it can be hard to find a flow and continuity. This suggests that workplaces could offer guided practice in groups as support for the personal practice. Portin also confirms that guided group practice gives an appropriate base for the individual sessions. The previously mentioned may be the explanation to why the ten research participants of this study did not manage to carry out their mindful meditation practice. Further, Portin mentions that even 10-20 min of daily mindfulness brings great results.

Ola Schenström (expert discussion 2, 26.6.2017), MD and founder of Mindfulnesscenter Sweden, agrees with the above statements. Schenström says that mindfulness at work is not feasible on a large scale and therefore it should be cut down to a ten-minute training once or twice a day. Schenström suggests that the employee follows an e-course and meets an instructor on a few occasions during the course. It is a practical model that has shown success in companies and organizations.



## 4.6 Discussion about the main results

In this section, the results gained from this research are reflected on and discussed again in relation to the theoretical framework, previous results and related theories. The italics of the text are in dialogue with the results.

*Like stated by Hanh (2009), Mindfulness meditation is the energy of being awake and aware to the present moment. Awareness of the breath is the essence of mindfulness. The practice of mindfulness leads to concentration, which in turn leads to insight.*

It emerges from this research, that mindful practice is possible for anyone wherever, whenever. Mindfulness meditation does not require equipment or even a separate space and can therefore be practiced anywhere. It is a method that is easily accessible at all times. The restriction with this particular practice is self-discipline. It has to come from the personal will to practice and to keep it regular and frequent. This research declares, that most of the respondents have created a habit of daily practice. However, there are still cases where the practice only occurs one to five times per week or is not consistent at all. The majority of the survey respondents have been practicing for four years and more. The average of the sample frame is 7,5 years of practice per respondent.

It may be possible to conclude, that mindfulness meditation can both be practiced formally and informally. The benefits of mindfulness training are naturally generalizable, meaning that it is possible to incorporate mindfulness into all areas of everyday life. It is easy and convenient to practice and the method does not result in major financial expenses.

*Like illustrated by Flaxman and Flook (2008) in their research, a study about stress regulation, even 5 days of meditation training at 20 minutes a day has shown; better stress regulation, a faster decrease in the level of the stress hormone cortisol, less anxiety, depression and anger.*

This conducted research similarly shows, that the respondents usually practice 5min-1hour, mornings and/or evenings respectively. If stress occurs some tend to take an additional moment to rebalance during the day. Moreover, the research claims that all respondents are practicing some other form of meditation practice in addition to the mindful practice. The most common practice is yoga but also other types of movement exercises, that put emphasis on the breath and controlled body movements, are used (quigong, anapana, affirmations etc.)

*Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally according to John Kabat-Zinn (2005).*

Kabat-Zinn's (2005) definition of mindfulness emerges from this research. The participants acknowledge that they become more aware of the present moment, the here and now, and that they are able to handle everyday life situations in a calmer way. Emphasis is put on the present moment in a non-judgmental way, leading to better decision making. The respondents confirm that mindfulness meditation gives them the possibility to focus more on the present and reduces rumination on past and possible future events. This concludes that efficiency in the here and now is gained, leading to better outcomes both at work and in personal life. Hence the research debates that mindfulness could be a tool for accessing the here and now. Mindfulness is about seeing things that are happening in the moment. That is what most people miss, the things they take for granted and notice only when they're gone.

*Mindfulness meditation results in various benefits, such as decreases rumination and enhanced attentional capacities according to Davis and Hayes (2012).*

This research can relate to the above statement. The overall conclusion from the respondents was positive. Mindfulness practice has made it easier to communicate with co-workers and the ability to see situations from a different point of view has increased. In addition, greater understanding for the other has been achieved. From the study, it emerges that a suitable self-esteem makes it easier to communicate and collaborate, both in personal life and at work. The ability to understand and having empathy increases when

practicing mindfulness meditation.

*Following up on the above, Morgan (2015) states that mindfulness meditation, when practiced regularly, can change brain wave patterns to gradually go from beta to delta. Concluding that mindfulness meditation leads to a more calm and relaxed mind.*

From this research, it emerges that a greater calm was achieved and that rumination was reduced. This can be mirrored back to Morgan's (2015) research that has been done on the brain wave patterns. Mindfulness meditation practitioners feel that they can better control their mind and thoughts, leading to more focused thinking. Negativity is blocked out and attention is directed on the essential. Decreased brain wave patterns finally result in a calm and focused mind.

*According to Hyland et al. (2015) initial research has suggested, that both shortened and online mindfulness programs are associated with positive work-related benefits. Meditation even for 15 minutes twice a day has been shown to bring beneficial results (Manocha 2000).*

The above sheds light on the desire from some of the respondents; having the possibility to practice mindfulness meditation in groups at work. It could be recommended that organizations would provide mindfulness seminars for their employees. If the outcome is positive, continuous lectures can be arranged occasionally and the possibility to practice could be implemented. From this research, it emerges that Portin and Schenström (mindfulness professionals) express the same thing as Manocha (2000); mindfulness meditation even for 10-20 minutes at least once a day has shown beneficial results amongst those who practice. In other words, it can be concluded that there is a possibility where mindfulness could be a successful method for preventing work inability.

*One of the world's largest multinational companies, Google, believes that these mindfulness programs teach emotional intelligence, which helps people better understand their colleagues' motivations. (Schaufenbuel 2015)*

Google prides itself as an example amongst forward-thinking companies that have realized the importance of emotional intelligence and offer mindfulness meditation programs for their employees. This is a topic that is currently of considerable interest and therefore it is something organizations in the modern society should acknowledge. The respondents of this survey all confirmed being open to new ways of improving and developing their work environment. Declaring that if provided with the option to try something new, they would be willing to do so. The respondents also admit that they experience being able to make more sensible and constructive choices, both at work and in personal lives when practicing mindfulness. The survey of this research states that mindfulness meditation practice has led to the creation of a better professional self-esteem.

*According to Klatt et al. (2016), who analysed a five-year healthcare utilization and the associated costs for participants in a workplace-based MBI. The study shows a significant trend toward the workplace interventions lowering overall healthcare costs in the US.*

The above-mentioned research supports what this study has been discussing. Healthcare expenditure in Finland is constantly rising, like in the US. According to AMRA, it is possible for organizations to implement workplace-based lifestyle interventions to control the employee healthcare cost, similar to the system Google has been using. It could be concluded that each organization has the possibility to improve their internal productivity and wellbeing, which eventually leads to reduced costs for the national healthcare system. This research proposes that mindfulness meditation practice could be one solution.

Moreover, this research endorses that some respondents feel like the practice would create an art of fellowship amongst the co-workers. Respondents believe, that if the practice is simply introduced, explained and made clear that engaging is optional, it would be successful. This way no pressure is put on the employees and they can decide for themselves if there is an inherent need for the mindful practice. The research clearly states that only those who individually find their way to mindfulness meditation are the ones who actually engage in a continuous practice.

*According to Rissanen (2015), Senior Officer at the MSAH's Department of Occupational Safety and Health, sickness absenteeism, presenteeism, work disability pensions and healthcare result in a large burden on the Finnish economy.*

The respondents of this survey all admit that they feel an overall positive change after starting the mindful meditation practice. The term "I feel good" or "I feel" in various contexts was re-emerging. In other words; individuals become more aware of how they feel or when a feeling appears inside the body. Once aware of the feeling it is easier to follow up on how it develops and to take action if needed. With this statement, this research suggests that mindful meditation could offer first aid against short-term sick leave or presenteeism due to e.g. lack of motivation, stress or early stages of burnout. The study suggests that mindfulness meditation practice could be used as a method helping to prevent and counteracting illnesses that emerge when the mind and body are unbalanced and not synchronized. A reduced amount of unnecessary sick leave days and presenteeism would result in a smaller economic burden on the KELA system and in better results for the organizations. The government saves money and the companies gain profit.

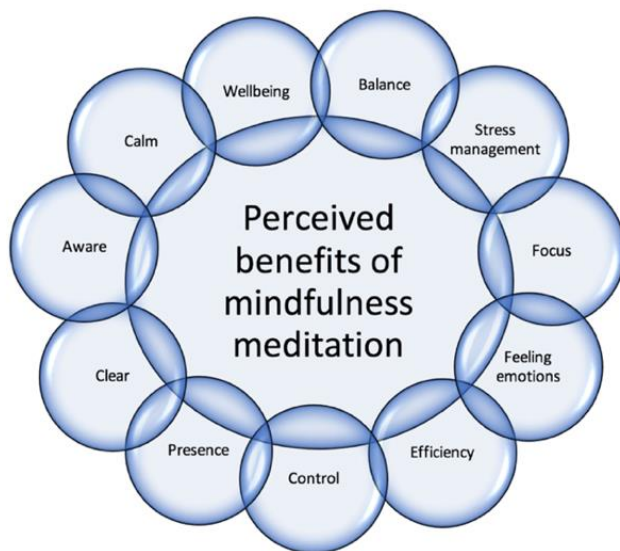
## **5 FINAL CONCLUSION AND A CRITICAL REVIEW**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

To be "mindful", or consciously present in the moment, is an approach that humans have within by nature. The ability of being "mindful" benefits both employees and their organizations. In today's modern Finnish society, employees are expected to be connected and available at all times. People tend to be on autopilot and forget the present moment. Investing in the wellbeing of employees can support this ongoing modern change. Organizations are dependent on their employees and their abilities, competencies and synergies. Capable, motivated and healthy employees are competent and willing to strive and work for the company objectives. Wellbeing at work influences an organization's competitive advantage in many ways. It decreases costs associated with sick leave, occupational accidents and work disability.

Having that said, mindfulness practice can be considered a tool that is easy to use and produces some effects. Mindfulness meditation may be considered a basic method for self-care, stress reduction and personal development. It is a method that is easily accessed, learned and carried out. Like stated in this thesis, lost labour input generates costs both to employers and the Finnish society, leading to major healthcare expenditure. Results from this study point out that mindfulness meditation could be a tool that can be used for prevention and reduction of sickness absence and presenteeism in Finland.

Through training in mindfulness, the ability to find more flexible solutions to problems increases and the automated way to handle things is reduced. Mindfulness programs teach emotional intelligence, which assists employees in better understanding their own and other's motivations and intentions. Mindfulness meditation research is therefore convincing many employers and managers that investing in reflection, openness, and thoughtfulness has a positive impact on employees and the work environment as a whole. The implementation of this self-care method within organizations could perhaps eventually result in decreased costs of lost labour input and healthcare expenditure in Finland.



*Figure 7: Perceived benefits of mindfulness meditation*

Figure 7 illustrates the perceived benefits of mindfulness meditation practice. This research has identified benefits such as: increased happiness and compassion, higher measures of wellbeing and a better quality of life including decreased stress and anxiety amongst the respondents. Mindfulness practitioners are expected to be calmer in stressful situations and able to stay more focused on various tasks. Further, it is believed that mindfulness practice results in eventually becoming more present and aware of individual actions, including a higher sense of control and an increased self-esteem. This can be associated with gains in emotional intelligence and the capacity to cooperate with others at work. This research acknowledges that mindfulness practitioners are more capable of taking others into consideration due to increased empathy. Mindfulness meditation remains a very relevant and current topic of considerable interest nowadays.

Organizations and employees need to adapt to an increasingly complex and changing work environment. Competitiveness and fast pace challenge the employees in their everyday performance. It is essential for the employers and employees to recognize the mutual long-term benefits that can be achieved through mindfulness practice. To live a healthy life is a challenge that individuals face whilst adapting to the western society's constantly changing requirements.

## **5.2 Critical Review**

In order to gain an idea of the value of the study and the result, the research should be critically reviewed (Björklund & Paulsson 2012). In this chapter, the research has been examined by using Larsson's (2005) criteria for critical review of a qualitative study. The reviewed themes are: perspective awareness, internal logic, structure, ethical and heuristic value.

### **5.2.1 Perspective awareness**

A pre-understanding of what is to be interpreted is required, to be able to create an overview of the work that is being done. When dealing with qualitative studies, it is

important to emphasize that the researcher's pre-understanding is mirrored in the research process. (Larsson 2005)

In this case, the researcher's personal experiences can be considered relevant to the subject and purpose of the study. The purpose and the research question of this study have been the focus throughout the process and enabled that relevant material was found. Further, every research has its limitations, and it is important that the researcher is aware of his or her own limitations when required to be objective. In this study, the researcher's own interest in the subject might be considered a limitation, as well as the participants' interests. Personal interest in a particular topic may lead to an emphasized focus on the positive aspects and reduced objectivity. In addition, it has to be taken into consideration that the researcher is personally familiar with the research participants which also may have affected the collected responses.



Moreover, the sample size is small, but since the objective of the study is to analyse subjective experiences it does not necessarily have to be considered a limitation. It is important to keep in mind that it may be difficult to draw conclusions and generalize results when conducting a qualitative research. The fact that the results are based only on the contribution of people with previous experience of mindful meditation, individuals who have already created a habit of practicing, can be considered a weakness of this study. It can be assumed that if a person pursues mindfulness meditation practice, he or she receives great benefits from it. The positive effects indicated by research that can be measured from only a few days of mindfulness meditation practice, support the findings of this study. Moreover, the setup of the survey questions has to be taken into consideration. One has to be aware that the questions may be aimed to receive desired answers. Lastly, it should also be taken into account that only one expert interview was carried out. Having additional interviews in this research may have made the answers and results more trustworthy.

### **5.2.2 Structure**

The presentation of the results should have an effective structure. This includes a requirement for transparency and reduction of complexity. A well-structured research means that it is clear and scaled down without affecting the content of the results. The reasoning must be followed without the important elements being overtaken. One might call it a red string. (Larsson 2005)

A reasoning has been developed that can easily be followed throughout the research. The details of the arguments are clear, relevant and substantiate to given conclusions. The results have been structured as easily and clearly as possible using main and subcategories. During the progress of this research, it has been important to capture the fundamental aspects of the researched topic. It is perceived that great care is required for all aspects and viewpoints.

### **5.2.3 Ethical value**

An important aspect of a scientific study is whether it exhibits appropriate ethics. As a researcher, one should be truthful and show "scientific honesty", which becomes visible in the concrete work. (Larsson 2005) Efforts should be made to be as truthful as possible when describing the phenomenon (Nyberg & Tidström 2012). Any possible harm towards participants when carrying out the research is regarded as unacceptable. The accuracy of reference management has to be considered as well as a clear distinction between own statements and what other writers and scientists utter about (Gustafsson & Norén 2014).

To avoid any misunderstandings all respondents in this study were informed at an early stage about the research. Each respondent had the freedom to decide whether to participate or not. Clear guidelines were given and a formal introduction letter was sent out (Appendix 1). The principle of informed consent means that prospective research participants should be given as much information that may be needed to make a decision whether or not to participate in a study. (Bryman & Bell 2011) For reasons of integrity, the subjects have been anonymized. This is estimated to have contributed to the study subjects being able to express themselves more openly, both in the interviews and in the questionnaire.

A flaw occurred in the collection of responses from the sample frame. After the data had been analysed, results pointed out that the ten respondents, new to mindfulness meditation, did not manage to carry out at least eight weeks of practice. In addition, one response could not be validated since two answers were left blank in the provided online survey. Due to this, 11 responses had to be eliminated from the sample frame. Despite the previously mentioned, the researcher considers that a valid conclusion of the conducted study could be made. The conclusions are considered to be anchored in the analysed and discussed material. Although final conclusions have been made, they remain open for further discussion and possible criticism.

#### **5.2.4 Heuristic value**

Heuristic value refers to that the study will discover new knowledge while acknowledging something that has been known in the past. The qualitative study shall provide a knowledge supplement through the form itself. Successful analysis results in a new way of looking at reality; new categories of thinking. (Larsson 2005)

The desired outcome of this research is that the reader will gain new knowledge and be persuaded to see any aspect of the treated topic in an alternative way. During the conduction of the research, acquaintances were made and new knowledge was gained.

### **5.3 Contribution to the research gap**

This study has helped to reduce the current knowledge gap concerning the perceived effects of mindfulness meditation for employees. Moreover, this research has shown that the subjects experienced effects which can mainly be linked to individual improvements both in personal lives and at work. It is not imposed that the results of this study are exhaustive or generally valid. The intention has not been to establish a positively true hypothesis, but rather to generate theoretical insights on the matter. By doing so, the results should rather be seen as a reason to carry out further research. The knowledge gap, in an area that is considered to be relevant for the ever-changing environment of employees within organizations in the Western society, has been reduced through answering the research question of this thesis.

### **5.4 Proposals for future research**

Continuous studies could look at how managers influence the implementation of mindfulness practice within organizations. Does the manager also have to be competent within mindfulness meditation practice for it to work in organizations and among the employees? Future research could explore the actual work environment and how it is affected by the manager. It could be debated whether more organizations should follow the footsteps of Google when thinking about developing their emotional intelligence and the wellbeing of their employees.



*Figure 8: Mindful practice and implementation is a process*

As seen in the above figure, mindful practice and its implementation is a process. The effects of shorter mindfulness programs need to be explored more extensively. The author hopes, that the results of this study can be used as a starting point for further future research. On a more general level, it can be noted that the mindfulness research is still young and sprawling. A clearer academic consensus is needed with further definitions and concepts. Synergies between the psychological, medical and business-related parts may need to be strengthened. More research within mindfulness meditation and leadership is something that is assumed to be of great interest for evolving modern organizations. Suggesting, that there is great potential for mindfulness meditation, its implementation and future research.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

Dear all,

I want to start by thanking you for willing to participate in my thesis research!

I have always had a tendency to overthink and worry. Thankfully I got introduced to Mindfulness, meditation and yoga; they turned out to be the best ways to calm myself down and stay focused on the relevant. Mindfulness is a relatively new topic and not a lot of research has yet been conducted on this matter. Researchers' interest in mindfulness practice has increased as studies continue to reveal its beneficial effects.

The attached CD will give you 2 guided exercises of Mindfulness Based Stress reduction meditation (Kehomeditaatio & istumameditaatio). In addition, there is also an App available from App Store that you can download for shorter exercises (See below for further instructions).

The idea is that you will practice mindfulness meditation every day for 8-weeks. However, you can individually decide on the length of the sessions. It does not matter if it is 10 minutes or longer, the important thing is that you meditate on a daily basis.

I hope you enjoy this Mindfulness program. Meanwhile, please do not hesitate to contact me if any questions arise; 0440996789 / [halpinfi@arcada.fi](mailto:halpinfi@arcada.fi). I will be available at any time!

After 8-weeks of practicing, kindly get in touch with me. I will then provide you with a questionnaire and am more than happy to meet up for a personal interview if possible. The purpose of the questionnaire and interview is to find out how you have perceived the effects of mindfulness meditation during the past few weeks.

Happy meditating!

With Kind regards,

Fiona Halpin

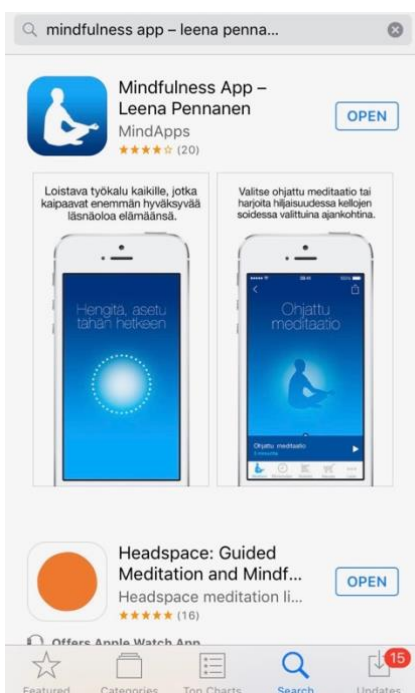
## Mindfulness App – Leena Pennanen

If you wish to meditate for shorter sessions, Leena Pennanen's Mindfulness app is perfect.

It is available from AppStore for 2,99€.

The App contains different meditations, including guided options. In addition, you can also create your own meditations.

This is also a very convenient way to meditate if you do not have access to a CD player or computer. With this meditation app, you can easily and very conveniently meditate wherever you are.



Below you can find two additional Mindfulness apps that may be useful:

Headspace  
Insight Timer

## Appendix 2

### Thesis Questionnaire

#### Mindfulness meditation in the business world

Thank you for taking the time to fill out my thesis questionnaire. It is very much appreciated!

1.
  - a. Why did you decide to start practicing Mindfulness meditation?
  - b. How long ago did your practice start?
  - c. How did it feel to start this practice?
  - d. How does your practice feel now (has it changed)?
2. Do you feel different since you started practicing mindfulness meditation?
  - a. If yes, please specify?
  - b. If no, why do think you don't feel different?
3.
  - a. How many days a week do you meditate?
  - b. Do you meditate more than once per day?
  - c. What time of the day do you usually meditate?
  - d. On average, how long do you meditate for?
  - e. Do you practice Yoga or any other types of meditation as well? Please specify.
4. Has your ability to handle stressful situations at work changed since you started Mindfulness meditation? Please specify.
5. Since starting Mindfulness meditation how do you define your relationship to multi-tasking?
6. Do you feel like Mindfulness meditation has affected your self-esteem in situations that might feel challenges it? Please specify.
7. What does the term 'here and now' mean to you?
8. How do you perceive your work environment?
9. How do you believe that Mindfulness meditation could fit into your work place?
10. Do you think that the organization you work for would see any benefit towards incorporating Mindfulness meditation? If so, please specify.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview Informed Consent Form**

The following is an interview consent form for a research project. It is a research project on MBSR Mindfulness practice, carried out by the principle investigator (Fiona Halpin) of this project from Arcada University of Applied Sciences. The interviewer (Fiona Halpin) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and respond to any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed forms.

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#### **Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Fiona Halpin from Arcada University of Applied Sciences. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about academic work for the conduction of a research project.

1. My participation in this research project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study there will be no consequences.
2. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question in the discussion or to end the interview immediately.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Fiona Halpin from Arcada University of Applied Sciences. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this research will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.



5. Faculty and administrators from Arcada University of Applied sciences will not be present at the interview but will have access to raw notes or transcripts if needed. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

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My Signature

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Date

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My Printed Name

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Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:

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